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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes three presentations on the diverse teaching and assessment strategies used in a course designed to prepare preservice teachers for involving families and the community in the education of children. The course is required for early childhood and elementary teacher education majors at the University of Memphis (Tennessee). The first presentation described the rationale for the course and how it fits into the overall curriculum for preservice teachers. The second presentation focused on teaching strategies used to meet the course objectives. These include: collaborative learning activities, reflective thinking experiences, introduction to the World Wide Web, field experiences with parents, workshops and simulated parent conferences, and panel discussions by parents and professionals. The third presentation discussed the assessment strategies used. Some of these are: significant questions developed and used as a barometer of progress, reflective thinking feedback sessions, workshop feedback sheets, pre-post assessments on students' perceptions of their ability to plan and implement programs for parents and families, and post semester reflective statements. Six examples of assignments, three examples of assessment strategies, and the course evaluation form are included. (Contains 17 references.) (ND)

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**Involving Families in Education:
Using Diverse Teaching and Assessment
Strategies to Prepare Teachers for This Role**

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**Paper presented at the 1997 Annual Meeting of the
Association of Teacher Educators**

**Washington, DC
February 15-19, 1997**

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Description of Presentation

The purpose of this session is to describe the diverse teaching and assessment strategies used in a course designed to prepare preservice teachers for involving families and the community in the education of children. This course is required for Early Childhood and Elementary teacher education majors during their junior or senior year at The University of Memphis. The majority of the students will be licensed to have their own classrooms about one year after they complete this course. This course entitled, "School/Community Relations," prepares teachers for one of the many roles they must play in schools in a democracy.

This session will consist of three brief presentations followed by a discussion period.

1. The first presentation will describe the rationale for the course and how it fits into the overall curriculum for preservice teachers.
2. Details regarding the variety of teaching strategies used to pursue course objectives will be described in the second presentation.
3. The third presentation will describe the variety of student and teacher assessment strategies used in the course.

Rationale for Course

Teachers often lack the knowledge and skills needed to collaborate with parents and families effectively. This may be partly attributed to the absence of preparation in this area in many teacher education programs (de Acosta, 1996; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Foster & Loven, 1992; Williams, 1992; Williams & Chavkin, 1984). For example, only 4% of teacher-training institutions in the Southwest offer a course in parent-teacher relations and 15% offer part of a course, whereas a majority of the teacher educators, principals, and teachers agree that a course in parent involvement should be required for undergraduate students in elementary education (Chavkin & Williams, 1988). Because of the lack of initial training in parent involvement, most teachers are forced to rely on their accumulated life experiences in dealing with parents, which often do not provide them with the special skills they need to be effective (Moles, 1993).

De Acosta (1996) recommended three themes for inclusion in foundation courses designed to enhance the prospective teacher's ability to collaborate with families: family and schools, community and schools, and the context of teaching. These themes, coupled with reflection on practicum experiences with families and community agencies, include many of the ideas that are a

part of this course as well as recommendations made by other educators and researchers (Bermudez & Padron, 1987; Davies, 1993; Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Foster & Loven, 1992; Houston & Houston, 1992; Kaplan, 1992; Kochan & Mullins, 1992; Moles, 1993; Williams, 1992; Williams & Chavkin, 1987).

Teachers entering the profession today must possess the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and strategies that will enable them to work effectively with students and families from diverse backgrounds. The authors believe that the theme of family involvement in education should be the focus of a required course for all prospective teachers, as well as a topic to be infused in course work throughout the teacher preparation program. Findings from a study of teaching practices in this course appear to support the premise that course experiences focused on family involvement have the potential to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enable them to foster effective parent-teacher collaboration on behalf of children (Morris, Taylor, Knight, & Wasson, 1996).

Teaching Strategies Used to Meet Objectives

Course experiences were planned using the following underlying beliefs and assumptions (Morris et al., 1996):

1. Parental involvement in educational activities at home and at school is essential to the child's success at school.
2. Parents and teachers should be viewed as partners in the educational enterprise. As adult learners, parents must be involved in making decisions about school involvement and educational activities that are designed for them (Berger, 1995).
3. Teachers who have high self-esteem and who feel confident about working with parents are more likely to be assertive in reaching out to involve parents in their children's activities (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 1992).
4. Teachers must assume the leadership role in reaching out to involve families and other community members in the life of the school.

Three guiding principles were used to develop the 4 major assignments for the course (Morris et al., 1996):

1. Each assignment was written for a specific purpose which was not unlike assignments that teachers take on as members of preK-8 faculties. For example, in

Involving Families 4

many school settings, teachers are asked to solicit input from parents on ways that family members can participate in activities in the classroom and at the school. Also, surveys and interviews may be used by teachers to elicit information from family members regarding topics they want to know more about. Using this information, teachers are expected to take on the responsibility for planning and implementing parent meetings and workshop sessions.

2. Each assignment was written with a particular audience in mind, perhaps a principal, teacher team, or group of parents.
3. Each assignment was sequential and developmental in nature. For example, the last assignment was more complex than the first and the last assignment was developed using information from Assignments 1, 2, and 3.

The 4 major assignments were: a) conducting parent interviews, b) developing a parent involvement/education plan for one school year, c) developing a parental involvement notebook, and d) planning and implementing a parent workshop.

Throughout the semester course, other assignments and discussions provide information that support the development of the four major assignments. Early in the semester, the class discusses the elements of successful meetings for parents and the instructor models those elements in a workshop on a critical issue related to positive school outcomes for children. Class members complete a sample parent questionnaire (as if they were parents) selecting topics they want to know more about. These data are used to develop the one-year plan and the parent workshops. Other topics pursued in this course include a history of family life and parental involvement, working with diverse families, effective school-community relationships, communicating with parents, leadership training in parent education, school-based and home-based parent programs, and conducting parent-teacher conferences (Morris et al., 1996).

Teaching strategies used in this course include:

- collaborative learning activities that are used for short-term projects as well as for a semester-long project. Examples include using expert sheets and planning and implementing a parent workshop.
- reflective thinking experiences, both written and oral are used throughout the semester.
- a lesson on using the World Wide Web to access resources related to family involvement in

education in the College of Education's Macintosh lab.

- practical experiences in the field, interviewing parents about involvement in school activities of their children and attending workshops and parent-child fairs conducted by school and community groups.
- a model workshop session that is conducted by the instructor and colleague(s).
- simulated parent conferences and workshops.
- panel discussions by parents and professionals from the field on multiculturalism and the skills, strategies, and attitudes needed by teachers as they interact with children and families from diverse backgrounds.

Some examples of these assignments are found on pages 6-12. Several of the assignments can be used as instructional as well as assessment strategies.

Assessment Strategies Used to Determine if Objectives Were Met

A variety of assessment strategies are used to: a) determine if objectives have been reached, b) determine if teaching has been effective, c) determine if material has been understood, d) determine if remediation or acceleration is in order, and e) revise course experiences throughout the semester and for future semesters (Griffin, 1988). Some of the assessment strategies include:

- significant questions that are developed at the beginning of the course and used as a barometer of progress at mid-semester and near the end of the semester.
- reflective thinking feedback sessions following selected course experiences.
- workshop feedback sheets supplemented by oral feedback of instructor and peers.
- pre-post assessments on students' perceptions of their ability to plan and implement programs for parents and families.
- post-semester reflective statements related to major assignments completed for the course.
- exit slips.

Examples of some of the assessment strategies used are found on pages 13-17.

A more comprehensive view of the course findings and analyses based on some of the assessment tools used are reported in an article entitled, "Preparing Preservice Teachers to Reach Out to Parents and Communities," published in the Spring 1996 issue of Action in Teacher Education (Morris et al., 1996).

**The University of Memphis
College of Education
Instruction & Curriculum Leadership**

ICL 3511 School/Community Relations
Dr. Vivian Gunn Morris

Spring Semester 1997

Writing Assignment 1: Parent Interviews

The principal of the PreK-8 school where you are employed as a teacher wants to improve the involvement of parents in the life of the school. You have been asked to interview four parents to determine their present level of involvement as well as find out the kind of involvement they think is important. **These must be in-person interviews** (face-to-face), not completed by telephone or questionnaires completed by the interviewee (s). You will report your results to the principal in a **three- to four-page (maximum) essay, typed double-spaced.**

Date Due: Monday, February 24, 1997

Requirements:

Interview **four parents** (mother and father of the same child count as one interview) of children enrolled in grades P-6 to obtain the information listed below. Your completed report must include:

1. Age of child and grade level in school
2. Type of school child is attending--private, parochial, or public
3. Strategies used by the school to get parents involved in activities of the school, i.e., how are parents invited to participate, ex., telephone calls, newsletters, home visits, notes sent by children)
4. List of school activities in which the parents interviewed are involved
5. Extent of involvement of interviewed parents--number of hours per week, month or year
6. In parents' opinion, of what value or benefit is their participation in the education of their child
7. Recommendations to your principal regarding the parent involvement program at your school, based on the information gathered from the four interviews
8. A description of how the information gained from these interviews profits you as a prospective teacher

Evaluation Criteria:

You must include all the topics noted in the "Requirements" section and follow the criteria for essays handed out in class.

PLEASE STAPLE ALL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS--NO REPORT COVERS OR FOLDERS UNLESS NOTED ON ASSIGNMENT SHEET!!

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Dr. Vivian Gunn Morris

Spring Semester 1997

Writing Assignment 2: Parent Involvement/Education Plan for One School Year

As the team leader for the Parent Involvement/Education Committee at your PreK-8 school, you have been asked by the principal to develop a plan for the entire school year, from September through May. Provide **details** in your plans regarding what you propose for **each month** using the requirements that follow. Remember to consider data from your parent interviews, sample parent survey, themes being studied in your classroom, and seasonal classroom activities in which children may be involved. Your plan should be **four to six pages long, and typed** using the format shown below. Your plan will be reviewed by a supervising teacher or administrator (to be assigned by the school director) at The University of Memphis Campus School. This professional will review your plan and make recommendations for your final draft.

Dates Due: Observe the dates noted below in completing the final draft of your plan.

Monday, March 10, 1997. Submit a typed copy of the plan to the inservice teacher/administrator for review and feedback.

Monday, March 17 or 24, 1997. During this week, schedule an in-person conference with the inservice teacher/administrator to get written and oral feedback on your plan.

Monday, April 7, 1997. Submit to the course instructor: 1) the draft of the plan submitted to the inservice teacher/administrator, 2) the checklist completed by the inservice professional, and 3) the final draft of your plan incorporating recommendations made.

Required Format:

Month of:

Title of monthly meeting or workshop session :

Type of group meeting format proposed (Read chapter 6 of textbook for examples of groups meetings):

Leader(s) for session: (i.e., panel of parents, nutritionist, dentist, classroom teachers)

Strategies used to invite parents to attend or participate in session (Include incentives for getting parents to attend meetings as well as "how" parents are invited to attend meetings. Read chapter 5 for successful strategies):

Brief narrative description of plans for the meeting (Include purpose of the session, a summary of content, and other related activities for the month. See chapters 4, 5, & 6 of textbook for helpful ideas for this section):

Evaluation Criteria:

You must include all the elements noted above for each month and follow the criteria for essays handed out in class.

**The University of Memphis
College of Education
Instruction & Curriculum Leadership**

ICL 3511 School/Community Relations
Dr. Vivian Gunn Morris

Spring Semester 1997

Assignment 3: Parental Involvement Notebook

You are required to collect information relevant to facilitating parental involvement activities at your PreK-8 school. The materials will be organized in a **looseleaf notebook, with a descriptive index**, so that it can serve as a useful and accessible resource for you and other teachers at your school. . The notebook **must** include a **minimum of ten entries in each of the seven (7) categories** listed below. Include a table of contents that lists each entry. Use a variety of sources (*i.e., do not copy all entries from one or two workbooks, textbooks, journals or magazines*).

Date Due: Monday, April 21, 1997

Required Categories of Entries:

1. Involving parents in the classroom
2. Involving parents in the school
3. Involving parents in educational activities at home
4. Written home-school communication
5. Parent education activities
6. Publications from organizations and agencies related to parental involvement or education (**see addresses to write for resources beginning on page 439 of text, call or visit local community agencies or parent fairs to obtain related publications, contact local teachers or parents for copies of materials**).
7. Other category (name your category). Select a seventh category that you think will be helpful to you and your school as a resource for working with parents. Examples might include: multicultural education, parents of exceptional children, working with parents of abused and neglected children, and child advocacy.

Reflective Summaries:

At the beginning of **each** of the seven categories, choose **one entry** to write a summary page (maximum 1 page) that:

1. Indicates why the entry was selected for inclusion in your notebook; and
2. Communicates what you learned from the selection about working with families and children.

**BEGIN COLLECTING TODAY TO AVOID THE LAST MINUTE RUSH!
IT OFTEN TAKES FOUR TO SIX WEEKS TO RECEIVE INFORMATION
REQUESTED BY MAIL.**

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Dr. Vivian Gunn Morris

Spring Semester 1997

Writing Assignment 4: Parent Workshop--A Group Project

You are a member of a team of teachers at your PreK-8 school that has been assigned the responsibility for planning and implementing an evening, parent education group meeting that meets the interests and needs of your parents. You will work together as a team to plan and conduct the meeting. Remember to consider data from the sample parent survey, parent interviews, themes being studied in your classrooms, and seasonal classroom activities in which children may be involved.

Date Due: Monday, February 24, 1997
April 14, 21, or 28, 1997

- First draft of written plan
- Oral presentations
- Final written report due on day of oral presentation

Requirements:

Your project will consist of two parts.

1. **Written Plan.** The written plan will include
 - Workshop or meeting title
 - Goal of meeting or workshop (major purpose)
 - Objectives (outcomes for parents, what you want them to be able to do)
 - Activities (methods and strategies used to achieve the objectives)
 - Evaluation (strategies and techniques for determining if objectives have been met)
 - Materials and resources (needed to carry out activities). Use standard bibliography format.
2. **Oral Presentation.** Each group will have 50 minutes to present their workshop during the last three class sessions of the semester. Teams are encouraged to use appropriate audio-visual materials as a part of their presentation. Copies of handouts required and equipment needs must be submitted to the instructor at least one week in advance of the oral presentation.

Each team member must be an active participant in both the written and oral presentations. The written plan will consist of a **maximum of two typewritten pages.** One written plan for each group will be submitted to the instructor.

Evaluation Criteria:

The written plan must include all the components listed above in the "Requirements" section and the criteria for essays handed out in class. The **final group grade** will be based on the quality of both the **written and oral presentations**

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ICL 3511 School and Community Relations

Significant Questions

1. What can teachers do to encourage parents to attend scheduled conferences?
2. What are some effective strategies for getting parents to support additional experiences for their children that are important to their development?
3. How can teachers be effective in getting parents involved in educational activities of their children in school and outside of school?
4. What can educators do to influence parents to get their children to school and on time?
5. What are the legal responsibilities and liabilities of teachers regarding child abuse and neglect? List the names of referral agencies that are available in the community that provide treatment and preventive services for parents and children as it relates to child abuse and neglect (including treatment for disabilities).
6. What is the most effective way to deal with parents regarding neglect concerns?
7. How can you reach parents regarding the needs of their child when their parenting skills are inadequate? (Some parents may feel embarrassed because they are aware of their inadequacies.)
8. What are some effective methods for modeling alternative forms of discipline for parents?
9. What can teachers do to influence parents to avoid placing excessive pressure on their children to succeed in school?
10. What are the steps teachers should follow in planning effective teacher-parent conferences--before, during, follow-up?
11. How do teachers deal effectively with parents that are reinforcing inappropriate behavior at school?
12. How can teachers work with parents to help their children follow school and classroom rules? (ex., guns, beepers)

**ICL 3511 School /Community Relations
Five-Minute Reflective Writing Exercises**

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

TOPIC: _____

List the 5 most important ideas you learned today:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

List 1 additional question you have about this topic:

From the point of view of a prospective teacher, write 1 paragraph that reflects how you will use information learned from this session as you interact with children and families.

ICL 3511 School/Community Relations

Assignment: Sharing Parent Interviews

Directions: Share with your workshop group the information noted below about your parent interviews. Summarize the data collected by your group and prepare to give a 2-3 minute report to the class based on your group's findings. Take 15 minutes to prepare your report. Each group should select a group facilitator, recorder, and reporter to complete this assignment.

Requirements: Each group should answer the questions listed below.

What did you find out about:

- Strategies used by the school to get parents involved in activities of the school?
- List of school activities in which the parents interviewed were involved?
- Range of extent of involvement of interviewed parents--number of hours per week, month or year?
- In parents' opinion, of what value or benefit was/is their participation in the education of their child/children?
- Range of recommendations made to your principals regarding the parent involvement program at your school, based on the information gathered from the interviews?
- How information gained from these interviews can benefit you as prospective teachers?

ICL 3511 Pre-Post Assessment

NAME _____ S.S.# _____ DATE: _____

MAJOR: _____ GRADUATION DATE: _____

Directions: Your responses are requested to complete a self-assessment related to course content and activities. This information will be helpful in planning experiences during the semester. Please circle the number that best represents your feelings about each of the items listed. **One (1) is low and five (5) is high.**

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | How knowledgeable are you about the elements of an effective conference or interview with parents? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | How comfortable are you with your ability to conduct effective conferences or interviews with parents? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | How comfortable are you about accessing resources needed to develop a one year parent education/ involvement plan for a K-6 school? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. | How knowledgeable are you about the elements of effective workshops for parents? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. | How comfortable are you with your ability to plan and implement effective workshops for parents? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. | How knowledgeable are you about successful strategies for involving parents in school activities of their children? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. | How comfortable are you with the process of developing positive relations with parents of children that will be enrolled in your class (es)? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. | To what extent do you feel that you can make a difference in the lives of the students that will be enrolled in your class (es)? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. | How knowledgeable are you about the advantages and disadvantages of parental involvement in school activities of their children? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. | How comfortable do you feel about your ability to encourage parents to increase their involvement in the school activities of their children? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. | How knowledgeable are you about the variety of parent involvement activities implemented in school-based and home-based programs? | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

WORKSHOP FEEDBACK SHEET

TITLE OF WORKSHOP: _____

WORKSHOP TEAM #: _____ DATE: _____

DIRECTIONS: Your feedback is requested to help improve each workshop presentation. Please circle the number that best represents your opinion about the above named workshop - - **one is low and five is high.**

1. How well were the workshop goals and objectives communicated? 1 2 3 4 5
2. How well did the workshop presentation address the topic? 1 2 3 4 5
3. How would you rate the workshop team's knowledge of the material? 1 2 3 4 5
4. How would you rate the workshop team's choice of materials and activities used to meet workshop objectives? 1 2 3 4 5
5. How would you rate the workshop team's choice of evaluation strategies? 1 2 3 4 5
6. How would you rate the relevancy of the workshop content for your organization? 1 2 3 4 5
7. What were the major strengths of this workshop?
8. Are there areas where improvements are needed?
9. What are your suggestions for future workshops?
10. Other comments:

(over please)

Workshop Feedback cont...

Elements of Successful Workshops

Directions: Please indicate whether or not you observed the elements listed below in the workshop session.

	<u>yes</u>	<u>no</u>	<u>Comments</u>
<u>Affective</u>			
1. Warm Greeting	_____	_____	_____
2. Children's Drawings, Journals	_____	_____	_____
3. Name Tags or Tents	_____	_____	_____
4. Group Exercise	_____	_____	_____
5. Refreshments	_____	_____	_____
6. Invitation to Participate	_____	_____	_____
7. Door Prizes	_____	_____	_____
8. Type of Presentation	_____	_____	_____
9. Decisions	_____	_____	_____
<u>Cognitive</u>			
10. Rationale	_____	_____	_____
11. Modeling	_____	_____	_____
12. Practice	_____	_____	_____
13. Feedback	_____	_____	_____

Other comments:

(over please)

ICL 3511 School/Community Relations
Exam 2

Name: _____ Date: _____ Score: _____

DIRECTIONS

Part I: Multiple Choice. The answers for items 1-40 **MUST** be recorded on the accompanying scantron sheet using a No. 2 Pencil. (80 points)

Part II: Essay Question: The responses for item 41 **MUST** be recorded on the front of the pages provided. **DO NOT** add additional pages. (20 points)

41. For each of the four major course assignments completed (i.e., 1)conducting parent interviews, 2) developing a parental involvement/education plan for one year, 3) compiling a parental involvement notebook, and 4) planning and conducting a parent workshop), discuss a,b, and c.
- a. Discuss the effect that planning and completing the assignment had on your developing competence and comfort level as a prospective classroom teacher who will be working with parents.
 - b. How has this experience affected your attitudes about working with parents?
 - c. Include comments about other course experiences that are relevant to this discussion.

Conducting parent interviews:

Developing a parental involvement/education plan for one year:

Compiling a parental involvement notebook:

Planning and conducting a parent workshop:

Note to workshop participants: One full page is allotted for writing the response for each of the four assignments.

Course Exit Slips

ICL 3511 School/Community Relations
Dr. Vivian Gunn Morris, Instructor
Spring Semester 1997

Please write your opinion of:

1. The course.
2. The usefulness of course experiences to you as a future professional.
3. The instructor.

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